DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 116 JC 820 374

AUTHOR Dallas, Susan, Ed.
TITLE What Are Interdisciplinary Studies? CSCC Bulletin, Issue 2.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Los Angeles, Calif.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; Community Colleges; Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; *Humanities Instruction; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Multicampus Districts; Social Sciences; Teaching Methods; Thematic Approach; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary studies are examined in this paper with respect to common teaching modes, advantages and disadvantages, courses integrating humanities instruction into occupational programs, and specific programs operating at six urban multi-campus community college districts. After an introduction to the rationale behind interdisciplinary instruction, the four most commonly used teaching modes are described: (1) team teaching by several instructors from different disciplines; (2) instruction by one teacher covering a panorama of several disciplines; (3) instruction by two teachers, each from a different discipline; and (4) thematic instruction. Examples are provided of each approach. After citing problems commonly encountered in team teaching and possible ways for overcoming them, the paper lists advantages of the interdisciplinary approach. Next, examples are provided of courses that integrate humanities instruction with occupational programs. Finally, the paper offers brief descriptions of interdisciplinary activities at colleges in six community college districts: Miami-Dade Community College, the City Colleges of Chicago, the Los Angeles Community College District, the Dallas County Community College District, the St. Louis Community College District, and the Maricopa County Community College District. (KL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED219116

CSCC Bulletin
Issue 2
1982

WHAT ARE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES?

Editor: Susan Dallas

Center for the Study of Community Colleges
1047 Gayley Avenue, Suite 205
Los Angeles, California 90024

JC 820 374

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. M. Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Issue 2
1982

BULLETIN

The *CSCC Bulletin* is published by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1047 Gayley Avenue, Suite 205, Los Angeles, California 90024. Telephone (213) 208-6088. Graphic design was contributed of the Office of Communications Services, Los Angeles Community College District.
Editor: Susan Dallas

What Are Interdisciplinary Studies?

Interdisciplinary studies are rooted in the premise that significant knowledge does not fit into neatly packaged, distinct subjects. Its proponents feel that there is much to be gained by examining material from a broad perspective or from the perspective of another discipline. An interdisciplinary course might be defined as one that encompasses the interconnectedness of two or more disciplines. Or, it could be one subject viewed from the vantage point of two or more disciplines. It has even been suggested that it is not so much an issue of content, but rather one of context, in which an effort is made to overcome the isolation of a single subject.

Reported reasons for establishing interdisciplinary courses are many and varied, ranging from general concern for creating an educated populace that is able to cope with an increasingly fast-changing world, to increasing enrollment and attracting new students to a particular discipline. Success of previous innovations in course structure has motivated some staff; others report a desire to overcome the fragmentation of material and students' disjointed views of their courses. As the interdisciplinary approach lends itself particularly well to introductory or survey courses open to a broad cross-section of students, it can maximize exposure to liberal arts in a short time interval. Some advocates of this approach see it as an antidote for the ever-increasing specialization of today's society, claiming that interdisciplinarity became an issue only after specialization became the norm. Others say that the broad focus on course content is designed to increase comprehension and turn on unmotivated students.

Teaching Modes

From New York to California, interdisciplinary courses are becoming increasingly popular, and various efforts have been made to develop integrated programs for liberal arts, occupational, and community service students. In 1978 the Center found that 26 percent of the community colleges nationwide listed interdisciplinary social science courses in their catalogues, and where they were offered, they accounted for over half the enrollments in social science. Although teaching methods are as varied as the courses themselves, most of these courses generally fall into four formats:

1. *Team-taught with each instructor representing a different discipline.* The advantages of this method are that it allows students to benefit from the diverse backgrounds, interests, and strengths of the instructors, and it provides a model of faculty as colleagues rather than competitors. At Saddleback Community College in California, a course called "Individualism: The Search for Meaning" is built on the assumptions that there is no single "interdisciplinary" point of view, and that each discipline has an equally valuable but distinctly different contribution to make to knowledge. Its four instructors are from four different disciplines. One of the goals of this course is to build bridges between the disciplines in order to reconcile for students the scientific – or analytic – and the humanistic – or empathetic – approaches to knowledge.

2. *One instructor covering a panorama of several disciplines, sometimes having other instructors as guest lecturers.* The advantages of this format are that it is administratively easier, and it avoids the possible confusion that some students may experience when exposed to the varying opinions of several instructors. At Hagerstown Community College in Maryland, "The Arts: A Creative Synthesis" combines

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)
art, music, and drama and is required in three career programs. The role of the instructor is to synthesize the diverse disciplines into a common body of knowledge that the student can internalize and draw upon.

3. *Two people teaching, each from a different discipline.* This method is frequently used in courses that combine the humanities with occupational programs. At Shoreline Community College in Washington, "Perspectives on Dying" is a joint effort by two instructors, one from humanities and one from nursing. Originally the course was designed to assist nursing students in dealing with the terminally ill and their families, but in response to student demand, it is now open to all students. Both the faculty involved and the students enrolled endorse the multi-perspective approach as well as the teaching format.

4. *The thematic approach.* This may or may not be combined with one of the above teaching styles. At Mendocino College in California, an ambitious program was instituted on the theme of "The World Food Crisis" combining social sciences with environmental issues. The goal of this two-year program is to provide a broad understanding of contemporary social issues to liberal arts students and people from the "back to nature" movement.

In their book, The American Community College, published by Jossey Bass, 1982, Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer make a strong plea for interdisciplinary studies in the chapter on general education.

Problems

The Center has found that team teaching predominates as the generally accepted instructional method in interdisciplinary courses. The team structure may involve all faculty as equal members, or one faculty member may serve as the team coordinator, bringing in guest speakers and taking responsibility for leading student discussions. However, team teaching presents certain administrative difficulties. Increased enrollment may be required to justify the presence of two or more instructors. The builders of interdisciplinary humanities courses usually strive to have them required; when that happens, students are initially drawn away from the specialized courses. Course preparations are very time consuming since instructors often are dealing with unfamiliar topics and new approaches to a familiar subject. Faculty may feel a sense of discomfort in embarking on unknown terrain. Assignment of credit may also present a problem, as may the transferability of interdisciplinary courses.

There are several solutions for these problems. The course may be cross-listed in two separate departments, in which case students may choose the discipline for which they receive credit. In other cases, the class may meet twice as many hours so that students receive credit in both disciplines. In some science programs, credit may depend on whether a student opts to include a laboratory component.

Advantages

Advocates of the interdisciplinary approach report many advantages. Their programs attract students from career and vocational programs, as well as from other disciplines; these are students who might otherwise ignore the humanities. Unusual programs can gain national attention for a college and possibly attract grant support. These courses offer an opportunity for humanists and scientists to work together and share their experience. The experimental nature of some interdisciplinary programs provides the opportunity for new personal or group dynamic situations in the classroom, both among the faculty, who have found it an enriching professional experience, and between instructors and students. Additionally, colleges report that interdisciplinary courses appeal to adult students and generally attract enthusiastic, innovative teachers.

Humanities And Occupational Programs

Courses that integrate humanities with occupational programs are examples of a popular approach that has begun to take hold in the last couple of years. At Chemeketa Community College in Oregon, "Literature for Technicians" is a course designed in conjunction with vocational instructors for students in such technical programs as electronics and automotives. Many of these students work at outside jobs, have poor reading and study skills, and have had previous negative experiences with liberal arts or humanities courses. This course attempts to redress the problem many people in the technologies have faced in having had humanities instructors attack the technologies in general or their interests in particular. Many of these students believe strongly in technology and need to be shown that no polarity need exist between them and the humanities.

"Introduction to Ethics" at Skagit Valley College in Washington provides the opportunity for students to take the code of ethics for their intended occupational choice and compare their own moral views to those of the profession. Students from law enforcement, nursing, education and other occupations have examined the codes of their vocations to determine which are good on paper but not in practice, which are consistent with practices in the working world, and which need to be modified or updated. The instructor has developed professional ethics projects for about 200 different occupations, to be used on an individualized basis.

At Abraham Baldwin College in Georgia, "Life Studies" is a three course humanities sequence designed to demonstrate the relevance of the humanities to students preparing to be technicians and middle level managers in agriculturally related fields.

"Medical Ethics" at Oakton Community College in Morton Grove, Illinois, is a philosophy course designed for students in allied health programs. It covers genetic engineering and testing, abortion, health care delivery, euthanasia, death and dying, and personal rights. Traditional ethical theories are presented as well as non-Western views, with the intent that students will develop their own ethical criteria to deal with these professional issues. Similar topics are covered at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas in a course called "Ethical Issues in American Health Care" where nursing students address the value issues attendant to the changes taking place in biological sciences and the resulting changes in the health care system.

News From The Districts

What is happening at the colleges participating in the "Advancing the Liberal Arts" project in terms of interdisciplinary courses? What successes are they having? What are their special characteristics?

As part of its work under the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to advance the liberal arts, and the Ford Foundation grant to facilitate student progress through the colleges, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges is encouraging the implementation of interdisciplinary studies. The 38 colleges in the six districts participating in these projects vary in some respects but are similar in others. While most of the colleges may have some interdisciplinary courses in place, a few of the programs are highlighted here.

Miami-Dade Has Full-Time Division

The Intercurricular Studies Division of Miami-Dade Community College, usually referred to as the I-Division, began its first year of operation in 1971, with a student enrollment of less than 3,000 credit hours. Several years later it has an enrollment of more than 9,000 student credit hours.

The expressed purpose of the Division is to provide a cost-effective alternative general education program for a heterogeneous student population. The I-Division was approved as an interdisciplinary division having the same autonomy as the more traditional Divisions of Humanities, Social Science, and Natural Science. Thus it has a full-time faculty trained in English, philosophy, literature, sociology, psychology, zoology, biology, chemistry and mathematics. Students are asked to take the knowledge acquired and apply it to their own lives and to the world in which they live.

The division uses a team teaching approach with instructors from natural science, psychology, sociology and English/humanities. Each of the disciplines reinforces the other so that the student experiences learning as a total experience rather than as fragmented activity. Emphasis is placed on creating a safe learning environment where the student is encouraged to ask questions and take risks. The Division uses both experiential and traditional methods of instruction. Faculty are encouraged to be innovative and creative just as faculty encourage students to be innovative and creative. Traditional evaluation techniques are used, but the Division also uses projects, observations, research study reports, simulation, and other varied techniques of evaluation.

While the I-Division offers a variety of interdisciplinary course combinations, the major curriculum offering is a two-semester interdisciplinary, experiential approach to general education. In each four-course, twelve-credit offering, traditional teaching methods are widely supplemented with field work and other experiences in which students are given opportunities to actively acquire the information, skills, and attitudes they will need in their lives. The various discipline courses are treated not as separate courses, but as different and interrelated approaches to concepts and problems.

Chicago Requires Survey Courses

Interdisciplinary education, in the form of University of Chicago-influenced survey courses, has been part of the City Colleges of Chicago curriculum since the system's beginning in 1911. The interdisciplinary character of that curriculum is reflected today in the existing general education requirement for six hours each of survey courses in the social sciences, physical and biological sciences, and humanities. Each college of the City Colleges of Chicago puts the pieces of the survey together somewhat differently over the two-course sequence: some thematically, others by treating discrete disciplines as units in the course.

City Colleges of Chicago has extended this survey approach down to the remedial and developmental level programs at the colleges. Certain remedial or developmental programs include as part of a 12-hour block program a survey course on American Social Issues or Popular Culture in America. Finally, since the City Colleges are in the midst of a general inquiry into the adequacy of their general education requirement, serious thought is being given to a series of interdisciplinary core courses that would be team-taught and might well replace their existing distribution requirements and core program. The City Colleges are committed to the concept of interdisciplinary education, and they are working hard to find the best model for their students.

Los Angeles Teaches Full-Time Employees

Interdisciplinary instruction takes place in a variety of teaching modes in the ten Los Angeles Community Colleges, from the traditional use of team teaching to the non-traditional open entry instruction utilizing media and learning center facilities. The objective of these programs is to gain insights which are not always apparent in the usual single discipline-oriented course.

Los Angeles Harbor College, for example, is now offering a program entitled PACE (Project for Adult College Education), an interdisciplinary pro-

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)
gram for people employed fulltime. With emphasis on a transfer-oriented humanities curriculum, students at the Service Employees International Union, Locals 660 and 434, attend weekly seminars, three weekend conferences, and watch a video component broadcast on public television to gain a semester's credit. The courses offered include history, humanities, English, and sociology. The program benefits include a delivery system accessible to workers, a thematic team-taught approach, and the opportunity to bring professional experts into the classroom at weekend conferences. The PACE program accommodates a formerly untapped student population and can serve as a model for other core-oriented educational programs. The 80 percent retention rate in the pilot classes indicates the demand for a Liberal Arts curriculum for workers.

Los Angeles Pierce College offers a special course of study in interdisciplinary liberal arts, which provides a comprehensive look at our cultural heritage. The classes, which are team taught, include a humanities core curriculum designed to meet a large part of the general education requirements for the Associate of Arts degree and for transfer students. The courses (six units each) cover the art, history, literature, music, and philosophy of the West from prehistoric times to the present.

"Why Do We Need To Know?" In Dallas

A series of programs at Mountain View College called "Why Do We Need to Know?" explores the importance of integrating the humanities with technological advances and an awareness of the future. The purpose of this program is to provide an environment in which students gain insight into history, government, English, science, and the importance of general education. Students are encouraged to question, explore, and recognize their roles in the social system.

The program attempts to use a single academic theme as a focus for learning. The first theme, "Science – The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," examines how achievements in science are related to major social issues of the day. Students have the opportunity to discuss issues from genetic engineering to nuclear power. Future themes will address the importance of art and the humanities, technology, economics, and business.

Members of the planning committee for the program have developed a bibliography for use by participating faculty. They also actively encourage faculty members to grant release time to students who would like to develop modules on topics relevant to the theme and to act as panelists at the symposia.

This program is unusual in that it is not housed within a particular department, and the participation of faculty members is solicited. Teachers are given the opportunity to volunteer their classes for presentations. This approach has given impetus to teachers trying team teaching, even in the more esoteric areas of the humanities and sciences.

St. Louis Invites Community

The Interdisciplinary Studies Program at Meramec College began in 1979 with a pilot grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. During 1981-82 it is completely supported by St. Louis Community College. As a supplement to their regular courses in Interdisciplinary Studies, Meramec also presents a lecture/film/roundtable series which provides events of general interest for the campus and the community. All events are free and open to the public.

The program includes a series of interdisciplinary courses in which the content and methodology are drawn from two or more academic disciplines. Among current offerings are: Biomedical Ethics; Women in Literature; Introduction to Latin American Civilization; Missouri Folklore. Thus a discussion entitled "New Modes of Human Reproduction: Artificial Insemination and In Vitro Fertilization" serves as a stimulating and important topic of interest to the campus community, and also relates directly to the Biomedical Ethics course. Finally, a number of staff development activities have provided another facet of this program, offering workshops such as "American Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Two-Year College."

Arts, Sciences, And Occupational Faculty Join Program At Maricopa

With administrative and student support, the Interdisciplinary Humanities program at Phoenix College continues to grow, with a recent emphasis on cooperation of occupational and arts and sciences faculty. The program is an attempt to reduce fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation among students and teachers, and to encourage intellectual discussion. Phoenix College now offers four interdisciplinary humanities classes. Sixteen faculty members, who are released from their departments to teach one class, have taught in the program since its inception in 1976. Of these, six are from occupational curricula. A class is usually taught by three teachers, each from a different discipline. The classes are organized around the selection of books from an eclectic list. Special cultural events are held throughout the semester, as are potlucks and other social events designed to encourage student-student and student-teacher interchange.

The Interdisciplinary Humanities Committee is co-chaired by two of the initiators of the program. For the last two years, one of them has been given reassigned time to coordinate the program. A Student Council meets regularly with several of the teachers. In all cases, when decisions have to be made, the people directly involved meet to reach consensus. Several seminars a year serve to introduce new teachers to the program and to acquaint the campus at large with the program. At the end of the school year, study sessions are scheduled for the teachers who will be teaching the following year.

Approximately 1,500 students have taken the Interdisciplinary Humanities classes. These students have shown significant progress in expressing their ideas, in writing effectively, and in comprehending both written and oral material. Teachers have gained cross-disciplinary insights and have enriched their knowledge in their own fields. Perhaps most significantly, the gap between the arts and sciences and the occupational curricula has been bridged.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges SEP 17 1982